

CONCEPTS AND ISSUES OF THE EUROPEAN URBAN SUMMER SCHOOL IN WROCLAW

> Urbanisation is a global process, yet it has left a particular legacy in European cities which constituted the content of the 2010 UN-Habitat European Urban Summer School. Young professionals and tutors with diverse backgrounds congregated from all over Europe and beyond in a central European city to gain a better understanding of urban change. Reconciling heritage with development was the challenge to achieve a more sustainable urban future. 'Sustainability' was conceived here as a balance between historic legacy, regeneration and citywide urban transformation. Wrocław, the host city generously provided the empirical setting to test these assumptions, to verify their validity through international comparisons, and to offer young professionals the opportunity to elaborate interventions towards a more sustainable urban future.

WAS THE PAST SUSTAINABLE, IS HERITAGE SUSTAINABLE, IS THE 'NEW' SUSTAINABLE?

< There has been an intense debate about how badly humans, or more precisely modern humans – have affected the natural environment, social relations and the economy, and it has been widely agreed that human influence has made things worse rather than better.

< The young professionals and experienced academics who participated in the European Urban Summer School examined these affirmations critically and looked for independent answers to this conventional wisdom about the 'good old times'. This led to the study of three main aspects of urban development: environment, society and economy, by comparing 'old' with 'new'. By exploring essential differences and similarities and focusing on pertinent questions followed by reasoned answers, the participants aimed to discern whether the future should be like the past.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS OF SUSTAINABILITY

< New city forms stemming from urban growth are continuously emerging and urban sprawl is commonly considered a more recent urban change. A key question was whether urban sprawl is detrimental to human settlements?

< What kind of congestion or, more generally, what transportation consequences does modern sprawl generate? What kind of urban sprawl or 'settlement heritage' exists in different European countries? How do these models of settlement affect climate change? What was better in the past, what is better now? What is a 'good model' of urban structure in terms of environmental sustainability? How is it possible to ascertain quality for a rapidly expanding quantity of built environment?

< These questions are important for the majority of people as more than half of the world's population has been living in cities since 2007. Wrocław with its rich and varied settlement traditions provided an excellent case to study these issues, to try to discover general rules, and to find local solutions.

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF SUSTAINABILITY

- The social dimension of sustainability encompasses many aspects. In the broadest sense it concerns quality of life and cultural differences. Translated into the use of space social sustainability could represent the 'right to the city'. Migration leading to social, ethnic and religious diversity has always formed an important part of European cities.
- Focusing on the topic of social diversity enabled the participants to examine whether European cities were balanced in terms of 'right to space'? Are modern gated communities a kind of sickness in the city or are they simply a new way to express power, segregation and differences? Were there earlier forms of gated spaces and who had initiated and used them? This leads to the crucial question of what is (or might be) private and what is (or should be) public in cities. If there is a right of citizens to 'common space', how can it be translated into spatial solutions, how are spaces selected, designed, managed, maintained, and who has the right and responsibility to use and transform them?
- Cultural differences and their influence on quality of life are thorny issues of social sustainability. Does everybody have a right to express their cultural identity in the city? Where are the limits of such expressions? Is there a right or a need of 'cultural engineering' in our cities? What is better: social mix or separation, or a combination of both? Is it possible to identify 'urban divide' in European cities?
- What is the spatial expression of such divisions?
- How did they manifest themselves earlier?
- All these issues lead to the more general question of whether there exists a cultural model for the European city. How may 'shared places' be arranged to attract all? What is the best policy for public spaces? Focusing on residential areas, the summer school explored 20th century housing traditions. Different models of housing developments were analysed, and their strengths and weaknesses identified. The study included public facilities and the way they affect quality of life.
- A very special moment in Wrocław's urban history is the population change which took place after the Second World War. How did this influence the

form and 'use' of the city? This question invited an analysis of cultural identity and heritage in terms of 'social memory' and whether a 'historic bridge' between past and future citizens has been built or whether there was still a need of constructing such bridges also within the wider context of the city.

ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF SUSTAINABILITY

The approach to economic sustainability focused on whether European urban heritage should be preserved, retained, developed, or transformed. The issue was whether heritage has an intrinsic value and whether such value would be social, economic or spatial. Should heritage and the cost of its preservation be considered as an investment? Who should pay for it? Is there a 'demand' for the 'old'? Does 'real' preservation of heritage exist *per se*, or is heritage used for its own purposes and in people's own way? Is heritage an element of transformation or of preservation? What is more essential for cities – change or persistence of its form? How is 'historic' defined? How was it treated in the past? Were there economic reasons in the past to preserve city forms or to change them fundamentally? How do new ideas from the more recent past (i.e. 'garden city') relate to the longer term past? Were such ideas 'innovative' at the time, or were they reinventing the past then, and when did they become 'history'?

The participants studied what 'heritage' really means and in what way it affects urban form and citizens' welfare. Does 'heritage' help to create the 'good city'? An answer may lie in the definition of essential features of revitalisation, not as a process of preserving but as one of using heritage as an important part of sustainable life. Thus, sustainable urban economics may not mean 'economic' profits alone, but 'social' profits as well.

The European Urban Summer School aspired to devise models of thinking to describe the past, to analyse the present and to conceptualise the future of cities, and to propose steps of intervention which may leave a more sustainable urban legacy for future generations.